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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: ARMENIA COMPLETES LAW ON ALTERNATIVES TO
MILITARY SERVICE

REFS: A) YEREVAN 1341

B) YEREVAN 1268

(U) Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect
accordingly.

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) On November 23, Armenia's National Assembly amended legislation that provides draftees with a mechanism to apply for an alternative to military service. These amendments clear the way for full implementation of the alternative military service law that was passed in November 2003 as part of Armenia's compliance with Council of Europe commitments. This fall, the Ministry of Defense accepted approximately twenty applications for alternative military service from new draftees and intends to process the applications before the recruits begin military service. The GOAM has not set a timeline for the release of conscientious objectors currently serving prison sentences. End Summary.

THE AMENDMENTS

2. (SBU) The approved amendments make several important changes to Armenia's law on alternatives to military service. The category of "civil" (i.e. completely non-military) service was added to the legislation, enabling conscientious objectors to work in hospitals and other public facilities rather than the military. The amendments also centralized the process of application and review. Both civil and alternative military service will last 42 months in contrast to the current 24 months draftees spend in the army.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

3. (SBU) Since the original law passed in November 2003, bureaucratic roadblocks have dogged implementation of the legislation. The Ministry of Defense did not complete recommendations on the amendments until June of this year, missing the spring legislative session (reftel A). While waiting for the amendments, the GOAM did not begin work on the logistics of implementation (reftel B). However, a Ministry of Defense (MOD) spokesman argued that the Government had not missed its deadline since the MOD accepted applications this fall, and the review board would make decisions before the new recruits begin active duty next year.

WORK TO COMPLETE

4. (SBU) Several obstacles still exist before the law can operate smoothly. The local representative of the Jehovah's Witnesses told us that he did know that the MOD was already accepting applications for alternatives to military service. He said it was the Government's responsibility to inform all draftees of the new program. He also stated that he knew of no procedure for the release of conscientious objectors who were convicted under previous law. (Note: ten conscientious objectors are serving prison terms and three are awaiting trial for draft evasion. End note.) A committee must still decide the composition and operation of the application review committee.

COMMENT

15. (SBU) While work is not fully complete on an effective system, the Armenian law on alternatives to military service appears to be closer to a reality. We understand the MOD may be somewhat irritated by being forced to implement this program. Local conscientious objectors are not quite sure they got what they asked for.

EVANS